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SAIGON FLIGHT HELD 'DISGRACE' TO C.I.A.

Ex-Analyst Says Agency Failed to Heed Intelligence on Evacuation

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

A former senior analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency in Vietnam has charged that the agency's 1975 evacuation from South Vietnam was "an institutional disgrace" that abandoned thousands of Vietnamese employees and collaborators and exposed them to North Vietnamese retaliation.

Frank Snepp, who was the C.I.A.'s principal analyst of North Vietnamese political affairs and prepared the agency's intelligence estimates in the final years of the war, further alleges in a book to be published next week—amid close secrecy and without Government clearance—that high-level officials of the C.I.A. and other Government agencies later prevented an investigation into the evacuation.

Major Failure in Evacuation

The central thesis of Mr. Snepp's 580-page book, titled "Decent Interval," is that there was a major failure to plan for the evacuation and that this failure occurred because United States officials—including Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, Graham A. Martin, the last United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, and Thomas Polgar, the last C.I.A. station chief in Saigon—had refused to heed intelligence showing that the North Vietnamese would directly attack Saigon.

Asked for comment on the Snepp charges, a C.I.A. official said that Admiral Stansfield M. Turner, Director of Central Intelligence, had investigated some of the allegations "and asked for more." None of the Snepp allegations had yet been verified, the C.I.A. official said.

Mr. Kissinger, speaking through an aide, dismissed the allegations as "nonsense."

Mr. Polgar said that, although he had always held Mr. Snepp "in the highest regard, what he's giving is the private's view of the war."

Mr. Martin, said by a family member to be traveling in Italy, could not immediately be reached.

A number of high-level Government officials, in recent conversations, expressed praise for Mr. Snepp's qualifications and reputation as an intelligence analyst. The New York Times was also able to verify independently some of the specific conversations and meetings described by Mr. Snepp.

The North Vietnamese offensive, launched early in March 1975, routed the Army of South Vietnam in 55 days, leaving it panicked and in full retreat. The evacuation program climaxed on the last day with the airlifting of thousands of Vietnamese and Americans from the roof of the United States Embassy in Saigon, as the North Vietnamese forces were poised outside the city. The vast confusion and disarray of the evacuation were sharply criticized at the time.

Allies Exposed to the Enemy

As a result of the evacuation planning failure, Mr. Snepp writes, the United States left behind 400 members of the South Vietnamese special police branch; another 400 working members of the Central Intelligence Organization, the C.I.A. counterpart in Saigon; a large staff of C.I.A. code clerks and computer operators; at least 70 translators, and hundreds of high-level Communist defectors who had served as informers.

In addition, Mr. Snepp says, the C.I.A. also failed to "insure the destruction of the personal files and intelligence dossiers" that had been assembled with the aid of the South Vietnamese Government "and which identified so many" of those left behind.

Among those thus singled out, he adds, were as many as 30,000 Vietnamese who were specially trained by the C.I.A. to participate in its Phoenix Program. That much-criticized operation was aimed at identifying and then jailing or "neutralizing" suspected members of the National Liberation Front, the Communist Party in South Vietnam.

Mr. Snepp's book provides the most detailed account to date of the activities and operations of the C.I.A. inside South Vietnam, as well as giving a first-hand account of high-level disagreements between Washington and Saigon over the use and integrity of intelligence.

Among the other major allegations in Mr. Snepp's account are the following:

1. The C.I.A. prepared a series of misleading analyses and other materials that were used by the United States Embassy in an attempt to knowingly mislead a Congressional fact-finding delegation that visited Saigon in February 1975 to study a Ford Administration request for more military aid.

2. Secretary Kissinger and James R. Schlesinger, then the Secretary of Defense, repeatedly and openly fought over Mr. Kissinger's insistence on delaying a full evacuation in Saigon.

3. Mr. Polgar, now stationed in Mexico City, was in effect "duped" by Hungarian diplomats into believing until the last few days that a coalition Government was possible in Saigon.

4. The South Vietnamese Government abandoned \$220 million in gold bullion, its state treasury, that somehow did not get shipped to the Federal Reserve Bank in New York, as it was supposed to be.

ring its distribution.

In 1974 the C.I.A. did delay publication of the "The C.I.A. and the Cult of Intelligence," by Victor Marchetti and John Marks, and then censored major segments of the exposé.

The concern at Random House was complicated by the fact that high-level C.I.A. officials, including Adm. Stansfield M. Turner, Director of Central Intelligence, had permitted Mr. Snepp to interview present agency employees as part of his research. They did so on the basis of Mr. Snepp's assurance that he would submit his manuscript to the agency for clearance before publication.

In a postscript to his book, Mr. Snepp explains that he decided not to keep that agreement after learning that the agency had selectively "leaked" some details of its role in the evacuation to two newsmen in an effort to "protect its image."

Worked for C.I.A. Eight Years

Mr. Snepp, a native of Charlotte, N.C., who is 36 years old, served eight years with the C.I.A. after joining the agency in 1968. Six of those years were spent in the United States Embassy in Saigon.

Because of its central accusation and the dozens of other disclosures, the Snepp book poses an immediate problem for the C.I.A., which has been under repeated Congressional criticism and investigations in recent years.

In addition, Admiral Turner is now in the process of dismissing more than 800 employees of the C.I.A.'s operations divisions, which was responsible for covert operations overseas. Those dismissals, which reportedly will be spread out over the next two years, have created anger among many senior agency officials, raising the possibility of more books and more disclosures.

The evacuation of more than 55,000 Vietnamese and 6,700 Americans in April 1975 though widely criticized, was defended as a success at the time by the Ford Administration. Ambassador Martin told a House subcommittee in January would be judged as "a hell of a good job."

In directly challenging that thesis, Mr. Snepp accuses some senior C.I.A. officials of callously walking away from agency outposts around South Vietnam without destroying sensitive documents and without making arrangements for the evacuation of employees and agents. In addition, he writes, two American C.I.A. agents were captured by the North Vietnamese and talked freely under interrogation, exposing even more secrets and more names.